

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: 2 Kings 6:8-23.

When we reach this part of the life of Elisha, we come to touch an ultimate feature of the power of resurrection. It relates to the Throne in heaven. That which comes out of the sixth and seventh chapters of the second book of Kings is that secret, mystic touch which Elisha had with the Throne above. You are here getting away from the things which are more of an incidental character, back behind things, and you find that there is a secret, hidden communion between Elisha and the Throne of God in heaven. The very plans of the Syrian king, and his purposes, are divulged. Elisha has secret information apart from men, apart from all human observation. He knows within himself what is taking place. He is in touch with the Fountain Head of all knowledge, and it is by reason of the secret spiritual touch with the Throne that he so acts, and so moves, as to frustrate plans which would involve in death and destruction.

In New Testament words, Elisha comes to the place where he is not ignorant of the enemy's devices, but is cognizant of them. It is spiritual perception; it is spiritual knowledge. It is knowledge which springs from a spiritual union with the Throne of government in the heavens.

When the king of Syria seeks to take him, two other things of the same character come before us.

1. The Opening of the Eyes of Elisha's Servant

The Lord opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to see what his master was already seeing, that of which he was already aware, the spiritual hosts on the side of the Lord's servant.

Here again is union with the Throne in a very real way, and with all the Throne-resources.

2. Blindness Brought to the Syrian Host

In the same way by that union power is put forth to bring blindness upon the great host sent by the Syrian king to take him. Because of that touch with the Throne Elisha takes command of the opposing forces, and becomes the governor, the ruler, or one in command.

Here is a foreshadowing, in a sense, of what happened with Paul on his voyage to Rome. He began the voyage, humanly speaking, by being a prisoner, and concluded it by being both in command of the commander and of all under his command - the ship, the crew, and everything else. It was simply a case of spiritual ascendancy because of his being in touch with the Throne.

Then again, the same thing is embodied in the turning of the famine recorded in chapter 7. There is a terrible and devastating famine, with horrible and ghastly aspects: the next day there is food obtainable for nearly nothing, and the hosts of the besieging army turning off because of a rumor, but so turned off as to leave all the provision of the hosts behind as resources for God's people. It is by the Word of the Lord at the mouth of Elisha that this is done.

In all these matters you see two things, or two parts of one thing. There is the power of life triumphant over death, but this as representing a union with the Throne. And in recognizing that, we should recognize that the supreme, the ultimate issue and intention of knowing Him, and the power of His resurrection, even here in this life, is union with the Throne. It is heavenly union with the Lord.

This is where that foundational thing in the life of Elisha comes out in its fullest, its highest, and its deepest expression. That is to say, Elisha commenced his life ministry upon the establishment of a spiritual union with his master who had gone into heaven. The spirit of Elijah having fallen on Elisha made them one, and Elijah in heaven and Elisha on earth are in oneness by reason of that spirit. All that comes through in the life of Elisha is simply the expression of what is implied by Elijah being in heaven.

In all this we can quite distinctly see the type of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the right hand of the Majesty on High. The Church as His instrument, His vessel on earth, is united with Him by the Holy Spirit, and is therefore in vital union with the Throne where He is. The Church is here to express the power, the dominion of that Throne of the ascended Lord. Into that all believers, individually and collectively, are called by the Lord.

Let us break that up, and first of all simply observe:

1. The Fact of Union With the Lord

It would not take us long in turning to the Word to establish the fact. We should only have to take one part of the Scriptures alone to establish that quite definitely, but there is a very great deal more. If we were to take the Gospel by John, we should find there that union with the Lord is one of the great features of that Gospel. It is illustrated in various ways right from the beginning - in the second chapter, the third chapter, the fourth chapter, the fifth chapter, the sixth chapter - right on it is one many-sided presentation of the truth of union with the Lord. And then there comes a point at which the Lord, having illustrated it, emphasizes it. Having shown it to be the deepest reality of the relationship between Him and His disciples, and His disciples and Himself, He begins to speak of going away, and says much about not tarrying, of there being but a little while and He will have gone. By such utterances He has provoked in them considerable concern, so that they are much troubled.

Then, when that anxiety, that fear, that dread, that concern has reached a certain point of intensity in them, so that it is approaching the point of overwhelming depression, He changes the whole course of things with His Word of exhortation, "Let not your heart be troubled..." From that point He goes on to show that all that He has been saying about union is to be a spiritual thing of a deeper, stronger character than all His earthly association with them. He shows that although He is going, He is yet remaining; although He will be in heaven, He will still be in them. The union is a tremendous reality. He is saying quite clearly that this is far more real than the association of people on the earth.

You move from this Gospel to John's first epistle, and you know how much the same thing is emphasized there: "...our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son..." That is the basis of the epistle. The nature of that is expanded in the epistle, but we are not dealing with the nature, we are observing the fact of union with the Lord in heaven.

This is not merely the relationship between a god and his worshippers as in heathenism. There is a relationship between the gods of the heathen and their worshippers, but you can never call it a union. This is not relationship between a Creator and His creation. This is not a relationship as between a master and his servants, neither is this the relationship as of a workman and his tools. All these represent a relationship, but they never represent a union. What the Lord has designed is something very different from that kind of relationship. We fear that there are not a few people who know only that kind of relationship. God to them is a Creator, and they are His creation. God to them is God - perhaps the only true God - and they are worshippers of the true God. But that is not union. God has willed union. That is a great fact which is revealed throughout the Scriptures.

2. The Nature, Basis and Plan of This Union

(a) The Nature

The nature is that which carries it beyond such relationships as we have just mentioned. The nature of this relationship is essentially spiritual; that is, it is a union of spirit. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." "...they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit..." because "God is Spirit." The union, then, is the union of spirit. That goes deeper than any other kind of union. We cannot go deeper than that. That defines the nature of man in the deepest, the most real part of his being, that he is fundamentally in the sight of God, spirit.

(b) The Basis

The basis is life. That is what John brings out so clearly, by way of illustration, in his Gospel, and, by way of direct statement, in his epistle - "...God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." "He that hath the Son hath the life." That is a statement imposed upon the basic declaration that our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. The fellowship is explained as being that of possessing His very life. The basis of union with God is that God's own life is given to us in new birth, and upon that God builds everything, on that He counts for everything. Where that is not, God can do nothing so far as union is concerned.

In order to reach and realize all God's thought, God must put Himself into man in the very essence of His being, His very life. God cannot realize spiritual, eternal, universal intentions on the basis of natural life. The Scriptures make it very clear that man's own natural life can never be the basis of the realization of any of God's purposes, that God's own life alone can be that. Thus for all His hopes God first of all provides His own basis. God's hope is in His own life, not in ours, and He puts the basis of His hope within at new birth, and on that

basis He proceeds to the development of all His thought, and the realization of all His intention.

That life brings light. The light is the life. Without the life there can be no light. Light is essential, because man is not a will-less creature, but is destined to realize God's ends by cooperating intelligently with God on the basis of one life. Therefore, light is necessary; and if we walk in the light, we have fellowship. The basis, then, of union is life, and life issues in light, by which again obedience comes.

You will notice that in all these activities of God in bringing about spiritual union with Himself, the Word is His instrument. Life comes by the Word. Light comes by the Word. In the beginning of the creation, in bringing the creation into living union with Himself for His purposes, it was the Word first of all which was the instrument. In the re-creation, or regeneration, it is the Word again. "In the beginning was the Word," and it always is the Word. That is why the Lord Jesus said: "...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." So that life and light by the Living Word are the basis of union with God.

(c) The Place

The place of union is "the inner man of the heart," to use the New Testament phrase. Paul was fond of using that phrase: "...our inward man is renewed day by day," "...that He would grant you... that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. 3:16; A.S.V.). What is the inward man? It is our spirit, the innermost place of our being. That is the seat of union. Union is not first of all physical in character. That needs no saying. Union between us and God is not in its genesis of a mental kind, neither is it of an emotional kind. Union between us and the Lord is not in the realm of our soul at all in the first instance. It is in our spirit. It is a thing which is deeper than our soul; that is, deeper than our reason, deeper than the powers of our natural mind either to analyze or understand. It is deeper than our emotions, deeper than our feelings. The fact of union with the Lord, when it is established, abides when all our feelings contradict it, and when all our power of reasoning is completely confounded. When in the realm of the reason and in the realm of the feelings there seems to be greatest evidence that the union does not exist, it remains.

It is an important thing for the Lord's people to get that well settled, that union between us and the Lord has nothing whatever to do with our feelings nor our reasoning. If we sit down at times and allow our reasonings to carry us on, we shall conclude that the union does not exist, because there is so much which argues strongly and positively against any such union. If we allow our feelings, or our lack of feelings, to be the criterion, we shall give it all up and declare the whole thing to be a myth. From time to time feelings are altogether against the fact of union with the Lord. It makes no difference; the union is there if it has been brought about. People who take the position that they must feel it or else they will not believe, are going to have a bad time. The same applies to people who demand that they shall be able to follow this thing through with the completest mental argument.

The spiritual life is something which goes altogether beyond the range of man's mind. It is a very blessed thing to have that settled - provided there has really taken place that new birth, and there has been no positive, deliberate, conscious violation of the law of the new life, by which that life has been paralyzed, and shut up, and rendered for the time being inoperative because of disobedience; providing that we are going on in the light as we have it, and in obedience to the Lord. There will be times when the SENSE of the Lord will have disappeared from the realm of our souls, and when everything in the realm of our minds seems to be confusion and contradiction. Nevertheless the fact abides, the union is there. He is more faithful than our feelings.

It is a great comfort to know that, when our feelings vary, and our sensations change, when perhaps by reason of physical and mental weariness those stronger spiritual sensations, as we would call them, disappear, and for a time we seem to drop down out of the realm of the higher ecstasies of the spiritual life, and things get flat. But after a little while it passes, and we find the Lord is still there and we go on again. We come to understand that it was not the Lord who changed, but we were just having a bad time, and our bad time brought no basic change. We can cripple God by disobedience; we can paralyze Divine life by sinning against light; but even then "...if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father..." John puts that in his letter in connection with fellowship, and it is a comfort. It simply says this: "...our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son..." We are to "...walk in the light, as He is in the light." As we do so "...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth [Greek: keeps on cleansing] us from all sin."

The union is right deep down there in our spirit, deeper than the soul life in its variations, deeper than thought, deeper than feeling, yes, deeper than consciousness. In this matter our consciousness may not reach to the depths of God's work. You ask: "What do you mean by that?" We mean exactly what the Book of Leviticus means, when we find there a distinct provision for someone who sins unconsciously. Is there such a thing as

sinning unconsciously? That means that you have no consciousness about it, and yet it is sin. Consciousness is not the final rule. The final rule is God's standard, not our consciousness. Our consciousness, after all, is limited. God's standard is unlimited. God has provided in relation to His own standard, and not to the measure of our consciousness. That ought to help us. God has made provision right to the end of His demands, and not just to the measure of how much we are awake to those demands. God's work is deeper than anything that belongs to us.

3. The Issue of Union Is Government

All those features which we have mentioned are traceable in the sixth and seventh chapters of 2 Kings. Note the place of darkness - spiritual darkness as represented by the servant of Elisha, who could not see spiritual things. How does he come to apprehend spiritual things? Firstly, through his union with Elisha, who is the power of resurrection life, and then by reason of his union with Him Who is the life, he comes into the light. But what is the means? It is the Word. What is the result? Authority, ascendancy, dominion! It is coming at once from the place of fear and dread, as indicated in his words "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" to a place where he knows the truth - "...they that be with us are more than they that be with them." We come into a place of great spiritual strength by enlightenment through union in life.

That opens a very wide sphere of important and very valuable contemplation. It would take us right out into the full range of God's intention. You notice it, by way of illustration, in the order of creation - first darkness, the Word of life, light, order, and then man placed in dominion. That is an illustration in creation of God's intention in the spiritual relationship between Himself and the new creation - chaos, darkness, the Word of life, light, fellowship, dominion. Follow that right through, and you will see that the purpose of God in Christ, as revealed in the New Testament, is to bring man to the Throne. That is illustrated in John's Gospel, or set forth in a spiritual way: "...where I am, there ye may be also." That as a spiritual fact is brought about at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. You find that spiritually from that time onward the Lord's own were seen as in the place of absolute spiritual ascendancy and dominion. You see it very fully represented in the life of the Apostle Paul himself right to the end. Whatever may be the circumstances, the conditions of his life down here on earth, he is spiritually in union with the Throne above, so that even in a prison he never calls himself Caesar's prisoner, never refers to himself as the prisoner of Nero. He calls himself the prisoner of Jesus Christ, and in his prison, despite the earthly limitations, he is moving about in the limitless expanses of the heavenly places: he is no prisoner. He knows spiritually the meaning of union with his Lord above, and that is the secret of his fruitfulness and effectiveness of life.

Definite statements are made from time to time as to this thought of God. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." God's thought is that. Now it is spiritual; then it will be literal. Now it is inward union with Him in His Throne, with spiritual power and ascendancy over all other forces; then it will be manifested in its full, literal way - universal dominion through the Church.

This is the very nature of resurrection life. It is all bound up with our apprehension of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ. How do you apprehend the death of Christ? Do you apprehend the death of Christ as the death and putting away of a man who could never reign, who could never come to the Throne? Adam, after sin, could never come to the Throne; God could not put a man like that in dominion. Adam lost his dominion. God will never bring fallen man to dominion. The death of Christ puts away judicially the man who could never reign, to make room for a Man Who can reign. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus brings in the Man Who can reign. Do we apprehend the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as the bringing into being of another Man Who can go on to the Throne? The very essence of our resurrection-union with the Lord Jesus is the union of one life between Him as there in the Throne and ourselves as here. How do you apprehend the exaltation of the Lord Jesus? Do you apprehend it as your exaltation representatively? Do you apprehend that when He died, you died, when He rose, you rose? It is a spiritual reality.

Now that which was born of the flesh has gone; in resurrection it is that which is born of the Spirit, the spiritual man. That is you in resurrection with the Lord Jesus! And what is true of the death and resurrection, is true of the exaltation, that when He was exalted YOU WERE EXALTED in Him at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Have we grasped that Christ's being there is our being there in representation? That is not just some objective truth, but is made real by reason of His ascended life being now within us, and the Holy Spirit having created the living link between Him in heaven and ourselves as here. The fact that He is above all says that we in Him are also above all.

You say: "That may be true theoretically, doctrinally true, and I do not dispute what is said, but that is not true

in my case." That is not the Lord's fault! It is because we have not learned to live on the basis of His resurrection life. We have still tried to live a Christian life on the basis of our own life, and that can never come to the Throne. People who are trying to be Christians by effort, by endeavor of their own, are always far from reaching the Throne. They are the playthings of all the forces which are antagonistic to Christ. But when we know the secret of living on His life by the Holy Spirit, we know in a growing, a progressive way, that it is true that He is not there apart from us, but that there is a union between Him in dominion and ourselves in the power of His Own life. Resurrection life is in itself the very life of Christ in dominion. Whenever resurrection life in us has its way, it brings us into dominion. Whenever there is a working of His life freely in us, it puts us in a place of ascendancy, it lifts us above, it is spiritual power and dominion.

4. The Law of Union Is Faith

Here faith in the Lord Jesus becomes something more than perhaps we have hitherto realized. What is faith in Christ? It is the recognition of what He is at God's right hand for us and as us. There is a Humanity, a Man Who has passed right through and realized in every detail all God's thought for us, and God's thought for us is reached, fully and finally, in a Man. That Man has everything - not for Himself but for us - that is necessary to bring us to God's end. Christ is our Victory; Christ is our Life; Christ is our Wisdom; Christ is our Sanctification. There is nothing in all the catalogue of needs, in order to bring us to God's full thought, but what Christ is made THAT unto us, and faith makes that living by taking it and acting upon it.

Is the enemy raging? Christ has conquered, and is the Victor over the enemy. Faith brings Him in, and puts Christ over against the situation in which the enemy is so active. Whatever it may be that threatens to limit our coming to God's thought, Christ is the provision to meet that. But He only does so along the line of our faith. Faith in Christ is a wonderful thing. What you and I have to learn more and more is to bring Christ into the situation on our behalf, whatever the need may be, so that we live by Christ. There will always be a whole list of "I cannots," so far as we are concerned, but are we going to stop with "I cannot"? Or are we going to recognize once and for all that we cannot? That is settled! We need not say any more! But that is just where His "can" begins, and we do not stop short at a negative, we start at the positive - "I can do all things through Christ..." It is a challenge to us as to faith in Christ. It is bringing Christ into every situation. That is government, dominion. That is the Throne, because He is the exalted, reigning Christ.

We are glad that He is there in that position: "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him That filleth all in all." Faith recognizes that; faith sees that; faith applies that. It is what Christ is in heaven.

The course of things is that at the beginning we have union IN Christ WITH the Father; at the end we have union WITH Christ IN the Father. That is what the Word teaches. Firstly, our union is in Christ with the Father; then the Word shows that the end of the process is eventually union with Christ in the Father.

Union is a progressive thing. Faith at present operates in the direction of our union in Christ with the Father. Faith works out eventually to bring us in union with Christ in the Father. This does not mean - is it necessary to say? - absorption in the Godhead, or participation in Deity.

The main point of our consideration is that resurrection life, the power of His resurrection, is essentially in its nature a Throne union with the Lord, and that that is to have a practical outworking in a spiritual way now. Ultimately it will have a literal outworking universally. Our business at present is to learn how to reign in life by the One Man, Jesus Christ.

The Lord teach us what it means to reign in life.